

VZCZCXYZ0003
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHKO #2229/01 1150409
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 250409Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1329
RUCPDOC/USDOC WASHDC
INFO RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 0407
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1458
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0868
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1606
RUEHRK/AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK 0121
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 1061
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0575
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3564

UNCLAS TOKYO 002229

SIPDIS

STATE FOR D, G and OES/OA - MHAYES AND EAP/J - KMIDHA
USDOC FOR NOAA/NMFS - US IWC COMMISSIONER HOGARTH AND
McCARTHY

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: SENV EFIS KSCA IWC JA ETRD

SUBJECT: WHALING: JARPA II LETHAL RESEARCH FLEET RETURNS

REF: A) 05 TOKYO 2193; B) 05 TOKYO 2932;
C) 05 TOKYO 6131; D) 06 TOKYO 2073

SUMMARY

¶1. The first of Japan's expanded lethal research whaling expeditions under JARPA II returned to Japan from the Antarctic on April 14. The Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR) praised the new research program as having been "successfully conducted", but will now turn to the difficult task of trying to sell the whale meat in a glut market. The meat from the 853 minke and 10 fin whales, double the number of minke taken in previous years under JARPA, is currently refrigerated in Tokyo and Kanazawa in north-central Japan, while the ICR and the Fisheries Agency of Japan (FAJ) work on a national sales strategy. The wholesale price of minke whale red meat, regarded as the highest quality part of the whale used for sashimi, will be set at Yen 1,950 (USD 16) per kilogram, a 19 percent decrease from the price set under JARPA in 2004 and 2005. The price of fin whale is expected to be about the same. After the FAJ approves a sales plan, the ICR expects to start selling the meat as soon as possible, from June at the latest. END SUMMARY

JARPA II Delivers As Promised

¶2. On April 14, the whaling mothership Nisshin Maru arrived back in Japan at Kanazawa Port, northern-central Japan, from its five months-plus voyage conducting lethal research in the Antarctic under the Second Phase of Japan's Whale Research Program under Special Permit (JARPA II). Three sampling/sighting vessels, the Yushin Maru, Yushin Maru No.2, and Kyo Maru No. 1, arrived in Shimonoseki, southern Japan, on April 13, while the sighting vessels, Kyoshin Maru No. 2, reached Oi Wharf in Tokyo on April 15, and Kaiko Maru made it to Shiokama, northern Japan, on April 16. According to the ICR's press release (para 10), the first expedition under JARPA II took 853 minke whales (462 males; 391 females) and 10 fin whales (4 males; 6 females) as planned (minke whale: 850 plus/minus 10 percent; fin whale: 10). Because of

the January 8 confrontation with the Greenpeace vessel Arctic Sunrise, the central part of the Nisshin Maru was dented. The vessel also sustained other damages, such as "scars made with knives", according to the April 18 issue of the Suisan Keizai Shimbun, a fisheries trade newspaper.

¶3. Asked how the crew members were able to double the harvest from previous years, Hideki Moronuki, Deputy Director for the Far Seas Fisheries Division at the FAJ, told us that previous JARPA cruises could have taken many more whales, but had ended operations when the catch limit was reached. Under JARPA II, part of the previous "dead time" was used to kill more whales. In addition, increasing the number of crewmembers from 202 to 252 enabled the crews to work in two groups in 24-hour shifts, as opposed to only one group in previous years (ref B).

¶4. With regard to the mothership's ability to process the large fin whales, which had been in doubt, Hirohisa Shigemune, from the Stock Research Department of Kyodo Senpaku, which owns and operates the vessels, said that "it was not a big deal", as the crews used two winches to reel in the fin whales, whereas only one winch is normally used for minke. Veteran whalers with experience catching fin and other large whales during the heyday of commercial whaling are still active and shared their experience as well, he added. The Japanese version of the ICR's press release says that the JARPA II expedition faced a one month-long "disturbance" from Greenpeace and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, but Shigemune said that, in fact, their attacks were intermittent, resulting in only a half month's worth of disruption.

Now the Hard Part: Selling the Meat

¶5. The meat from 853 minke whales and 10 fin whales is currently refrigerated in Tokyo and Kanazawa in north-central Japan. The ICR has not yet calculated the total amount of meat from the harvest, but Takumi Ikeshima at the Public Relations Department of the ICR estimates the minke whale meat will amount to about 3,000 tons and the fin whale meat about 250 tons. The wholesale price of minke whale's red meat, regarded as the highest quality part of the whale used for sashimi, has been set at Yen 1,950 (USD 16) per kilogram, a 19 percent decrease from the price set under JARPA's 2004 and 2005 harvests. Fin whale meat is expected to be priced at about the same level.

New Customers: Hospitals and Company Cafeterias?

¶6. The ICR is currently discussing a sales strategy with the FAJ, focusing on expanding the market and target consumers. Ikeshima told EST FSN that the ICR considers hospitals and company cafeterias as possible new customers, on top of the current distribution routes such as seafood markets and whale meat restaurants. Moronuki said that the FAJ is "positively considering such plans" since they would take advantage of the "low-calorie, high-protein and, thus, healthy nature" of whale meat taken from the Antarctic Ocean. After the Director-General of the FAJ approves the sales plans, the ICR expects to start selling the meat as soon as possible, from June at the latest, according to Ikeshima.

¶7. To facilitate this expansion, industry observers say that a new company will be established in early May to sell whale meat and stimulate more consumption. The ICR and/or Kyodo Senpaku will likely assume their role of parent company, said Naohiko Akimoto, staff writer on the whaling beat at the Suisan Keizai Shimbun. According to

Akimoto, given that a total of 8,000 tons of whale meat will be distributed in Japan in 2006, a number of food processing companies have shown interest in entering the whale meat industry, attracted by declining prices.

¶8. According to the online version of the Yomiuri Shimbun's Kyushu (southern Japan) local edition, ICR Executive Director Mitsuyoshi Murakami commented that he "wished to appeal to the world to resume (commercial) whaling, in light of JARPA II's completion". But ICR's Ikeshima said that it would be impossible for Japan to return to commercial whaling like the old days, due to limited investments, manpower, and technology in the Japanese whaling community.

None Too Interested Japanese Media

¶9. Despite the "successfully conducted" JARPA II and GOJ proclamations that Japan's research whaling program was now "supported by the entire nation" (ref D), most Japanese media outlets, except for the fisheries trade papers, virtually ignored the return of JARPA II story in its nation-wide reportage. Major newspapers Yomiuri, Asahi, Mainichi and NIKKEI carried the news in local editions only.

ICR Press Release

¶10. The following is an English version of the ICR's Press Release dated April 15, 2006:

Begin Press Release:

MEDIA RELEASE
15 April 2006

ANTARCTIC RESEARCH PROGRAM A SUCCESS

The Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR) said today the first cruise of its JARPA II program in the Antarctic was successfully conducted and all scientific objectives were met. The Antarctic research vessels arrived back in Japan at the weekend to a fanfare from supporters and the public.

Director General of the ICR, Dr. Hiroshi Hatanaka, said today that despite efforts by anti-science organizations Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd, the researchers were able to meet their objectives, including the sampling of minke and fin whales.

"Despite all claims from these people that their protests had prevented us from obtaining our research quota, the fact is that minke whales are so abundant that we achieved our target - a statistically necessary number of samples," Dr. Hatanaka said.

"In addition, we conducted a sighting survey with great success and found that humpback and fin whales have continuously increased with high reproduction rates. It is clearly demonstrated again that the biomass of humpback whales in the JARPA II research area is well beyond that of minke whales."

The research vessels surveyed whale stocks over a distance of 16,238.07 nautical miles. The total number of whales sampled was 853 Antarctic minke whales (462 males, 391 females) and 10 Antarctic fin whales (4 males, 6 females).

During the two and half month expedition in the Antarctic, scientists collected through non-lethal research photographic data of natural marks from 13 Blue whales, 34 Humpback whales and 38 Southern Right whales.

Biopsy samples were collected from 13 Humpback whales, 15 Southern Right whales, nine Fin whales, five Blue whales and one Sei whale.

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End of Press Release

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